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ART. IV. — *The Divine Comedy* of DANTE ALIGHIERI. Translated by HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW. Boston: Ticknor and Fields. 1867. 3 vols. Royal 8vo.

Two years ago last May, when Florence was celebrating the six-hundredth anniversary of the birth of her supreme poet, and was thus giving expression to her joy in the freedom and union of Italy, among the contributions to the festival from foreign lands was a copy of the first volume of the first complete American translation of the *Divine Comedy*. There can have been few gifts on the occasion more fitted to touch the imagination of one capable of appreciating its significance. It was a testimony of honor to Dante from another world than his, — and of sympathy with Italy in her fulfilment of the patriotic longings and counsels of her greatest son. It was a homage paid by the new and modern world to the old ; and there was a peculiar fitness in the gift, not alone in its coming from the American poet whose fame has spread widest over Europe, and whose name has long been familiar in Florence, but also in the very character of his work, which, by its scrupulous fidelity to the original, and by its intrinsic merits, is to make the *Divine Comedy* better known to readers in America and England than any translation that has preceded it.

Dryden, in one of his admirable critical prefaces, says, speaking of poetic translation, that “ to be a thorough translator, a man must be a thorough poet.” In the present instance his demand is satisfied. Mr. Longfellow’s translation is the mature work of a poetic genius, long accustomed to exercise itself not only in original composition, but also in the reproduction of foreign poetry. The felicity of his minor translations has been universally acknowledged, and the same art and taste shown in them are shown in still fuller measure in this version to which he has devoted, with a sense of what was due to the character of his original, the most patient labor, and the service of his ripest faculties.

The appearance of such a work from such a hand naturally excites a fresh interest in the difficult question of poetic translation ; and in order to appreciate correctly the intention and

the achievement of Mr. Longfellow, there is need to understand the principles which have determined him in the choice of his method, and in the mode of rendering which he has pursued. It would hardly have been worth while for him to add another to the fifteen or twenty translations of the *Divine Comedy*, or of one of its three divisions, which already exist in English, unless it were clear that they all had been made either upon an erroneous method, or, if upon the right method, were defective in execution.\*

The discussion as to the proper method of translating, and the principles which should guide the translator, is an old one, and the question seems as far from settlement as ever. From the time of the letter of Jerome, *De Optimo Genere Interpretandi*, to Mr. Arnold's lectures "On Translating Homer," the subject has engaged the interest of scholars wherever scholarship has existed. A history of the various opinions that have been held, and the various rules that have been laid down, would afford curious and entertaining illustrations of the changes and diversities of literary taste and cultivation. The narrative of the contention between the advocates of free and those of literal translation, would be like the story of the battle of the nominalists and the realists.

Dante himself has the merit of being among the first to state clearly the fact that a perfect translation of a poem is impossible; that as a work of art its original language and form are essential to it. He says in a passage often cited from his *Convito*, "Nothing harmonized in the bond of poetry can be transferred from its own tongue to another, without breaking all its sweetness and harmony." Cervantes noted the same fact. In the talk between the curate and the barber in *Don Quixote's* library, the barber says, " 'I have Boiardo at home, but I cannot understand him.' 'Neither is it any great matter whether you do or not,' replied the curate; 'and I could willingly have excused the good captain who translated it that trouble of attempting to make him speak Spanish, for he has deprived him of a great deal of his primitive graces; a misfortune incident

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\* For a list of these translations, and remarks upon several of them, and for some general observations on translating the *Divine Comedy*, see *North American Review*, No. CCXI., April, 1866, Art. VIII., *Dante and his latest English Translators*.

to all those who presume to translate verses, since their utmost wit and industry can never enable them to preserve the native beauties and genius that shine in the original.'” Sir John Denham expressed the same truth with an admirable simile when he said, “ Poesy is of so subtile a spirit, that in pouring out of one language into another it will all evaporate.”

The substance, the mere meaning of a poem, may be transferred from one language to another, but neither the indefinite and indefinable power over the imagination and the feelings which has its source in the harmonious conjunction of material, spirit, and form, nor the subtile but intense effect of the associations that belong to words, is to be fully obtained or preserved in any translation. A work of art, as Goethe says, is not like a piece of soft clay, to be moulded at pleasure. A version of a great poem which shall be true to the original in rendering all its qualities, is an achievement beyond human faculties. To the production of the effect of a work of art all its original elements are essential, while the differences inherent in different languages, and in which the differences of race and civilization are embodied, cannot be neutralized or overcome, so that an English *Odyssey* or *Divine Comedy* shall be to us what the originals were in their time to the Greeks or the Italians.

What, then, may a translator hope to accomplish ? He may seek to transfer with fidelity the substance of his original into a new language, with as near a correspondence of form as the genius of language allows ; or he may seek to make a poem in his own language, which, so far as his capacity permits, shall reproduce the effect of the original as he feels it, but without exact fidelity to the letter of the work from which he translates. Under these two heads there has been every variety of practice, and every measure of success. The faithful method of translation has often degenerated into a system of literalism, to the loss of every poetic quality ; while, on the other hand, free translation has often been the name of mere paraphrastic license.

No general rules can be laid down for success in either method. The best translation must be far from a perfect reproduction, and a good translation of so much of a poem as can be

translated is no more to be made by rule, than a good style is to be written by rule. Success in the work depends on the genius of the translator.

The merit of a free or literal translation, as a translation, consists in the proportion in which it renders the elements of the original. The poetic translations that have been most popular, however, have for the most part widely departed from the simplicity of this principle, and have chosen rather to make poems, more or less excellent as the case might be, adapted to the taste of their contemporaries, than to follow closely the model set before them. Such were the favorite translations of our fathers, — Chapman's Homer, Fairfax's Tasso, Pope's Homer, Dryden's Virgil. In truth, these were rather substitutes for translation than translations. The arbitrary omission in a translation of matter belonging to the original, or the addition of matter not found in it, are privileges which the so-called translators have generally been ready enough to claim.

But an illustration from another art may serve to set these processes in their true light. An engraving may be called a translation of a picture. It preserves the lines and the expression of the original, — its substance ; and it represents in simple light and shade the inimitable, untransferable qualities and effects of tone and color. The thought of the artist is rendered, and so much of the form in which the spirit of his work has embodied itself as it is possible to render in a different medium. But no engraver would feel himself warranted, however great his own genius might be, in attempting to improve on the original by the removal from its design of what he might consider blemishes, or by the addition to it of new beauties. His duty is not to attempt to supplement the defects inherent in engraving as compared with painting, with features that the original does not possess ; but it is to give, so far as his art allows, the exactest representation of the work on which his own is based.

A similar rule should guide the translator. The art he practises is in its nature different from that required in the production of an original composition ; and he is bound to recognize its limitations. A mere verbal, word-for-word translation, which pays no regard to the finer qualities of style and diction,

of harmony and sweetness, may be compared to a hard outline of a picture ; while a thoroughly faithful translation, faithful alike to the thought and to the manner of expression, and giving as much of the native spirit of poesy as may be secured in the transfusion, may be likened to an engraving by one of the masters of the art.

Dryden, indeed, says, in his Preface to Translations from Theocritus, Lucretius, and Horace: "I have both added and omitted, and even sometimes very boldly made such expositions of my authors as no Dutch commentator will forgive me. Where I have taken away some of their expressions and cut them shorter, it may possibly be on this consideration, that what was beautiful in the Greek or Latin would not appear so shining in the English. And where I have enlarged them, I desire the false critics would not always think that those thoughts are wholly mine, but that either they are secretly in the poet, or may be fairly deduced from him ; or, at least, if both those considerations should fail, that my own is of a piece with his, and that if he were living, and an Englishman, they are such as he probably would have written. For, after all, a translator is to make his author appear as charming as possibly he can, provided he maintains his character, and makes him not unlike himself."

The critical judgments of Dryden, whom Johnson justly calls the "father of English criticism," are unquestionably always deserving of respect ; but in this passage he is but inventing an excuse for his own practice, rather than laying down a correct principle. His own practice, in truth, not infrequently leads him into what Cowley, in a defence of a similar practice of his own, judiciously terms a "libertine way of rendering." There could hardly be a more misleading and fallacious rule of translation, than that the translator is to make his author "as charming as possibly he can," and to attempt to write in the style in which, were the author living, and of the translator's nation, he probably would have written.

Dryden's latest follower, in translating Virgil, Professor Conington, one of the best scholars of the present generation, has, however, laid down the same rule in the Preface to his recent translation of the *Æneid*. "What is graceful in Latin,"

he says, "will not always be graceful in a translation; and to be graceful is one of the first duties of a translator of the *Æneid*." And he asserts that the translator should apply "a principle of compensation, by strengthening his version in any way best suited to his powers, so long as it be not repugnant to the genius of the original, and trusting that the effect of the whole will be seen to have been cared for, though the claims of the parts may appear to have been neglected." But this again is a translator's defence of his own practice; and Mr. Conington, like Dryden, has produced an English *Æneid*, of which it may be fairly said, that whatever its merits, (and in each instance they are unquestionably great,) its tone is not Virgilian, while the way of rendering is at times "libertine" enough.

Happily we can set the authority of Dryden himself against his own doctrine and against his own practice. In the Preface to *Translations from Ovid's Epistles*, he says: "The sense of an author, generally speaking, is to be sacred and inviolable. If the fancy of Ovid be luxuriant, it is his character to be so; and if I retrench it, he is no longer Ovid. It will be replied, that he receives advantage by this lopping of his superfluous branches; but I rejoin, that a translator has no such right. When a painter copies from the life, I suppose he has no privilege to alter features and lineament, under pretence that his picture will look better. Perhaps the face which he has drawn would be more exact, if the eyes or nose were altered; but it is his business to make it resemble the original. . . . But if, after what I have urged, it be thought by better judges, that the praise of a translation consists in adding new beauties to the piece, thereby to recompense the loss which it sustains by change of language, I shall be willing to be taught better, and to recant."

This diversity of Dryden's opinion, as thus expressed on different occasions by himself, is but an illustration of the diversity of judgment which still obtains among critics generally as to the end of translation and its proper method. Mr. Arnold, in his first lecture "*On Translating Homer*," says: "It is disputed what aim a translator should propose to himself in dealing with his original. Even this preliminary is not yet settled. On one side it is said that the translation ought to be such 'that

the reader should, if possible, forget that it is a translation, and be lulled into the illusion that he is reading an original work.' The real original is in this case, it is said, 'taken as a basis on which to rear a poem that shall affect our countrymen as the original may be conceived to have affected its natural hearers.' On the other hand, Mr. Newman, who states the foregoing doctrine only to condemn it, declares that he 'aims at precisely the opposite; to retain every peculiarity of the original, so far as he is able, with the greater care the more foreign it may happen to be'; so that it may 'never be forgotten that he is imitating, and imitating in a different material.' The translator's 'first duty,' says Mr. Newman, 'is a historical one,—to be *faithful*.' Probably both sides would agree that the translator's 'first duty is to be faithful'; but the question at issue between them is, in what faithfulness consists."

Mr. Arnold goes on to say, that he "shall not the least concern himself with theories of translation as such"; but he immediately proceeds to state his own theory, that it is the "translator's business to reproduce the effect" of the original; and afterwards, "his proper aim is, I repeat it yet once more, to reproduce on the intelligent scholar, as nearly as he can, the general effect" of the work he is translating.

This is but a vague direction, and it remains vague in spite of Mr. Arnold's efforts to give it definiteness. The effect of a great and sustained poem depends in great measure upon qualities which cannot be translated. It can no more be transferred from one language to another, than the effect of a great picture can be rendered by the best engraving of it. It is in the failure to recognize this truth that the main trouble exists in regard to the work of the translator. Translators have not understood the limits of their art, and, in the attempt to compass the impossible, have confused the whole question of translation, and have been led to form the most futile theories in regard to it. The impossibility of translating effects lies, as we have already said, in the nature of language itself, in the different meanings which corresponding words have acquired in different nations, and in the change which the progress of civilization makes in the ideas which men of one nation, but of



a different age, associate with the same words. A poem is not simply a pure production of an absolute poetic spirit which remains the same, unchanged and invariable in all places and times. Like all human works, it has historical relations which determine the manifestation even of its most abstract poetic qualities. It has its definite place in the annals of the culture of mankind, and its character is not less historic than poetic. M. Littré, in a paper upon Dante, in the first volume of his admirable essays upon the History of the French Language, has some excellent remarks upon this point, in speaking of the difficulties which attend the translation of a work belonging to a remote epoch, and especially of those which arise from the difference between a modern and an old tongue. He says: "Modern language is more abstract, words are more remote from their roots, have come nearer to playing the simple part of conventional signs, and consequently, if I may use the expression, are less speaking. The very qualities which the language possesses are of little service to it; it can both analyze and generalize, but its analysis is too subtle and too advanced, its generalization is too elevated and too scientific, to allow it to accommodate itself easily to archaic thoughts. Human thought such as it was in the time of Homer is not that of the time of Dante; and in like manner that of the time of the Florentine poet is not that of the nineteenth century. Language reflects thought from age to age; its shades vary; and when we bring them side by side, and endeavor to make them correspond, we are struck with the disparity between the ancient and the modern shade. . . . To translate an author of heroic antiquity or of the Middle Ages is an undertaking which is complicated by the difference of time. It is especially in translating that we perceive that a writer of the thirteenth or fourteenth century, for example, neither thinks nor expresses himself as we do. At every instant he surprises us by his ideas, his turn of thought, his unexpected forms of speech. As long as we believed that there was but one good literary manner, which for us was that of the seventeenth century, there was but one mode of translation,—to render the ancient authors, not such as they were, but such as they should have been, that is, to conform them to that unique

type of correctness and elegance; but at present, history, in making us understand the necessary relation between times and forms, has brought about a change in taste, and shown us the tradition of types of beauty. Thus the translations in which our fathers delighted displease us, and various ways are tried to satisfy the demand made by the feeling for these old compositions." The change in taste here pointed out by M. Littré is also noticed by M. Vapereau in the last volume of his *Année Littéraire*. "We require to-day," he says, "the ideas, the sentiments, the very language of the author, even though the language be brutal, the sentiments odious, the ideas absurd; formerly a translation was required to give to the ancient author something of our habits of thought and style, in order to assure him a good reception from the public."

This difference is due in great part to the advance of criticism, and to the application of the historical method to the study of literature. The deepest interest which a work of literary or any other art has for us, is not that which appertains to it as an isolated effort of human genius, but that which it possesses as one of a consecutive and allied series of monuments of thought and feeling, and as one of the records of the progress of the race in its slow development from age to age. To understand and appreciate it aright, to recognize its real merit, we require to know it exactly as it is; we desire it not remodelled according to modern ideas, but in its original form, with the qualities incident to it as a product of its own time. We seek the great works of other periods not merely for delight, but for instruction, that we may learn something from them of man,—something more than it is their direct purpose to afford. We read Homer and Dante, not only as the greatest of poets, but as men who, in setting forth their thoughts and imaginations, set forth also those by which mankind were filled and moved at the period at which they composed their works. Under the form of the *Iliad* or the *Divine Comedy* we seek the heart of man, and, if we cannot read the Greek or the Italian poem, we demand that the translator should give to us, not what a poet in our days might write upon their themes, but the exact substance of what Homer or Dante actually wrote. Pope's Homer may still be read, but only by

the student of Pope, not by the student of Homer ; and though Cary's translation of the Divine Comedy is far nearer to the original than Pope's Iliad or Odyssey, it is still too remote from Dante to furnish what the literary taste of our day requires.

The spirit of *realism*, which is so marked a characteristic of the so-called formative or representative arts in these times, prevails also in literary art. Truth not only to the outer and actual fact, but also to the essence, and to the facts of imagination, is the one thing needful alike in original composition and in the reproduction of the works of other men. There is a wide difference between genuine realism and that literalism which is sometimes mistaken for it,—as wide as the difference between truth and fact, between the spirit and the letter ; and the good translator is not he that sticks most closely to the letter, but he that gives the meaning of the letter most nearly.

Mr. Longfellow has performed his work in full sympathy with this prevailing spirit, and with entire recognition of the force of these distinctions.\* His translation is the most faithful version of Dante that has ever been made. He is himself too much a poet not to feel that, in one sense, it is impossible to translate a poem ; but he is also too much a poet not to feel that sympathy with his author which enables him to transfuse as much as possible of the subtle spirit of poesy into a version of which the first object was to be faithful to the author's meaning. His work is the work of a scholar who is also a poet. Desirous to give to a reader unacquainted with the Italian the means of knowing precisely *what* Dante wrote, he has followed the track of his master step by step, foot by foot, and has tried, so far as the genius of translation allowed, to show also *how* Dante wrote. The poem is still a poem in his version, and, though destitute, by necessity, of some of the

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\* Writing thirty years ago in the pages of this journal, and following Goethe in his statement of the two prevailing modes of translation, Mr. Longfellow describes one as that by which "we transport ourselves over to the author of a foreign nation, and adopt his situation, his mode of speaking, and his peculiarities," while the other is that by which "the author is brought to us in such a manner that we regard him as our own," and it is interesting to find that even at that time he gives in his full adherence to the former method.

most beautiful qualities of the original, it does not fail to charm with its rhythm, as well as to delight and instruct with its thought.

To give up the rhyme, that triple bond of sound and sense, which by its indefinable charm brings the soul of the reader into a frame which fits it to feel as well as to understand the poetry, which, like the subtle harmonies of music, quickens the heart, and rouses the imagination, with a sensation of the intimate and intrinsic union of spirit and form, — to give up this source of power and delight, which no other poet ever drew from so abundantly as Dante, is indeed to give up what no other devices of art can supply. “I give Dante my highest praise,” says Mr. Carlyle, “when I say of his *Divine Comedy* that it is, in all senses, genuinely a song. In the very sound of it there is a *canto fermo*; it proceeds as by a chant. The language, his simple *terza rima* doubtless helped him in this. One reads along naturally with a sort of *lilt*.” All this is lost in the version; but no one who knows the scanty resources of English in rhymes as compared with Italian, and no one who is familiar with the English versions in which the translator has endeavored to preserve the triple rhyme, — the versions of Cayley, of Thomas, of Ramsay, of Ford, — and has studied their effect, will regret that Mr. Longfellow abstained from the impracticable task of triple rhyming. “But,” adds Mr. Carlyle, “the essence and material of the work are themselves rhythmic. Its depth and rapt passion and sincerity makes it musical; — go deep enough, there is music everywhere. A true inward symmetry, what one calls an architectural harmony, reigns in it, proportionates it all: architectural; which also partakes of the character of music.” And this deeper music is what a translator may render and reproduce, — is what Mr. Longfellow has rendered and reproduced.

The great risk which the translator runs in seeking to reproduce the substance rather than the form of his original, is lest he produce a work of erudition rather than of poetry. The avoidance of this danger depends on his own genius, judgment, and feeling. He must have a subtle perception and delicate tact of the unchanging and universal elements of poetry, and of the individual characteristics of his author's style; and his

perception and tact must be refined by wide and careful study of the qualities of language and of the use of words. Without these faculties his version may be literal, but it will not be faithful in the highest sense. To render a word in one language by its etymological equivalent in another, does not always answer; the associations that have become connected with it in one may be so widely different from those which belong to it in the other, that it may possess a wholly diverse significance. The same principle applies to diction and forms of expression as to words; the same forms in two languages are not the invariable equivalents one of the other. For instance, the character of the three opening lines of the third canto of the *Inferno* would be utterly ruined by a translation into English which should give the precise form of the *si va*.

“ Per me si va nella citta dolente ;  
Per me si va nell’ eterno dolore ;  
Per me si va tra la perduta gente.” \*

Truth to the substance of a poem is not to be obtained by pedantic literalness. It is only by a sympathy with the essential spirit of the original, and by capacity to express this sympathy in his version, that the translator can attain the end he should have steadily in view. This sympathy will be shown in style. To render Homer as Pope did into heroic verse, or as Mr. Worsley did into the Spenserian stanza, or to render Virgil as Mr. Conington has done into the metre of “*Marmion*” and “*The Lord of the Isles*,” is an indication of a

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\* Mr. Longfellow has rendered these lines with essential truth : —

“ Through me the way is to the city dolent ;  
Through me the way is to eternal dole ;  
Through me the way among the people lost.”

An objection has been made to this version on account of the use of the words *dolent* and *dole* for *dolente* and *dolore*; the Italian possessing greater simplicity and familiarity than their English etymological equivalents. But here the translator doubtless was determined in his choice by the recurrence in the seventeenth line of *le genti dolorose*, which is properly translated by *the people dolorous*; and also by the fact that neither *grieving* nor *woful* sufficiently expresses the weight and dignity of *dolente*. Dr. Parsons renders the passage with vigor, but loses the powerful effect of the repetition of the sound and sense of *dole*, and closes with a line which fails to give the character of the original : —

“ Through me you reach the city of despair :  
Through me eternal wretchedness ye find :  
Through me among perdition’s race ye fare.”

want of sympathy with the qualities of the style of Homer and of Virgil.

The directness and simplicity of Dante's diction require of the translator a like directness and simplicity. The difficulty of preserving these qualities in a rhymed version is such as to make such a version practically impossible; and the sympathy of the translator is shown by his discarding rhyme for the sake of preserving more important elements of style. Mr. Arnold cites the *Divina Commedia* as one of the only two poetical works in "the grand style" which have been produced in modern times; and though the phrase is vague, it indicates that this poem is distinguished by a style so marked as to be almost solitary in excellence. The merit of Dante's style is its naturalness. His art is perfect in its truth. What he sees, or feels, or thinks, that he says. There is scarcely a passage in his poem that is obscure in its expression, or perplexed in diction. The dark passages are dark from the subtlety or remoteness of thought, or from hidden allusion, but never from want of plainness in the words. There is little contention in regard to the construction of his lines. His subject is almost uniformly grave, and his style corresponds with it in gravity and dignity; but its tones are as various as those of an organ, and his hand sweeps over the keys with a master's power, drawing from each pipe the note which goes to form with the rest the perfect harmony of his majestic composition. In sweetness and grace Dante is as unsurpassed as in force and elevation of expression. The varieties of human passion and feeling — from tenderness to wrath, from pity to contempt, from love to hate — are reproduced in the changing moods of his verse; and yet over all prevails his intense individuality, so that a verse of his is stamped as surely with his mint-mark as a verse of Shakespeare. Shakespeare is the only other poet who compares with him in universal range and individuality of feeling and of style, that is, in other words, in truth to nature.

If the translator's diction be forced, involved, or artificial, if his language be quaint, antiquated, or ill-chosen, he fails to translate Dante aright. The various and frequently changing tones of the poem can be reproduced, so far as it is possible to

reproduce them at all, only by following simply the manner of Dante's expression. Even the order of his words is not to be changed, except when the idiom of the two languages differs, or when another order than that of the original is more natural to the translator's tongue, and produces in it an effect of greater simplicity and directness. The translator is as much at fault if he arbitrarily substitutes a form of expression different from that which Dante used, as if he introduced fancies or images of his own in place of those of the poet.

But the translator's success is not to be achieved by formal fidelity and lip-service: it must finally and absolutely depend on his genuine respect for, and sympathy with, his author, and on his poetic sense, faculty, and culture. It is when judged by this test that the merit of Mr. Longfellow's work is most conspicuous. The method of translation which Mr. Longfellow has chosen is free alike from the reproach of pedantic literalism and of unfaithful license. In freeing himself from the clog of rhyme, he secures the required ease of expression; and in selecting a verse of the same metre as that of the original, and in keeping himself to the same number of verses, he binds himself to the pregnant conciseness of the poem, and to a close following of its varied tone. His special sympathy and genius guide him with almost unerring truth, and display themselves constantly in the rare felicity of his rendering. The work has been attempted before, in English, after a similar method, by Mr. Pollock, in a translation of the whole poem, and by Mr. W. M. Rossetti, in a translation of its first division. Of these versions we spoke in the article to which we have already referred, "*On Dante and his latest English Translators.*" In German the same course was followed by King John of Saxony, in the excellent version which he published under the pseudonyme of Philaethes, and more recently by Carl Witte, the most eminent and devoted of living students of Dante. The motives which determined two such thorough scholars to adopt this line-for-line, unrhymed mode of translating, may well be regarded as conclusive as to its being the one best fitted to the German and English tongues.

The version of Mr. Rossetti is that with which Mr. Longfellow's will naturally be compared, since both have been made

upon the same general plan, and guided by a like theory of the duties of a translator. The number of lines which are identical in both versions is a curious proof of the straightforward simplicity of Dante's style.\* Mr. Rossetti's, which deserves very high praise for its general vigor and literal closeness, seems to us far behind that of his American competitor in elegance as well as substantial fidelity. Mr. Rossetti appears purposely to have made his versification crabbed, and he is overfond of words that may be called uncouth both in the obsolete and current sense of the term. Not seldom we are brought up with verses like these:—

“In the time of the false and lying gods.”

“I come from where I would return unto.”

“Then said: ‘It grieves me more thou ’st caught me in  
The misery,’” &c.

“I ’m put so far adown because from out —”

“Remember Pier da Medicina, if —”

Mr. Rossetti seems as designedly to have made his verses end abruptly, as Dante prolonged his with the undulation of female rhymes. Mr. Longfellow, like the King of Saxony in his German version, has given more musical motion and lyrical sentiment to his verse by imitating the practice of his original in this respect. Accordingly it should seem as if the one had chosen a dialect more infused with Saxon, and the other with Latin. Yet this will not be found true on examination. Mr. Rossetti is sometimes Latin enough to please Dr. Johnson. For example, at the end of Canto III., he translates Dante's simple

“La terra lagrimosa *diede vento*,”

“The tearful country *exhaled wind*.”

Mr. Longfellow is far finer:—

“The land of tears gave forth a blast of wind.”

So in Canto V. Mr. Rossetti translates

“La bufera infernal che mai non resta

Mena gli spirti con la sua rapina

Voltando e percotendo li molesta,”

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\* It should be remembered that, though Mr. Longfellow's *Inferno* was not published till 1867, a few copies of it, substantially the same, were printed early enough to be sent to the Dante Festival at Florence in May, 1865. The version was completed before the publication of Mr. Rossetti's. It is on a copy of this earlier edition that our remark in the text is predicated.



“ The infernal hurricane which never rests  
 Driveth the spirits with its virulence ;  
 Rotating it molests, and smiting them — ”

Mr. Longfellow gives the passage thus : —

“ The infernal hurricane that never rests  
 Hurtles the spirits onward with its rapine ;  
 Whirling them round and smiting, it molests them,” —

which is as close to the sense and far more in the spirit of the original. Both have intensified *mena*.

In the same canto Mr. Rossetti makes Francesca call Dante

“ O gracious and benignant animal,”

thereby not only making her guilty of discourtesy, but losing the pathos of the original word *animal*. When we remember Francesca's femininely regretful allusion to the *bella persona che le fu tolta*, the words “ *living creature*,” as Mr. Longfellow has rightly rendered *animal*, become full of nature and feeling. The word should be Englished in the same way at the beginning of the second canto, where both translators give us “ animals ” instead, thus seeming, as the word is ordinarily used, to exclude men from those whom the twilight takes from their toils, and losing altogether the antithesis implied by the poet.

Mr. Longfellow's exquisite taste has saved him from certain oddities in language to which Mr. Rossetti seems prone. We have such phrases as “ conversing matters,” “ the cruel beast fell suchlike to the earth,” “ Threw it withinside of the greedy tubes ” (the throats of Cerberus), “ *O'ertaking* more of the distressful coast,” “ Crying each other eke their shameful catch,” “ In whom doth avarice custom its excess,” “ Within the lofty fosses on we *reached*,” “ abovehead of us,” “ what-like,” and many more. In Canto XXIX. we have

“ Out of the mouth of each a sinner's feet  
 Were in excess ” (*soperchiava*).

In Canto XXI.,

“ Non far sopra la pegola *soperchio*,”

rendered by

“ see

There be no *surplus* of thee o'er the pitch.”

And in Canto XXV., *troppa materia* becomes “ *extra matter*.”

Often Mr. Rossetti's oddities arise from a misjudging desire of literal fidelity, as in Canto XXIV., where we read,

“ Which crashes suchlike snittings in revenge,”

though we can hardly so explain

“ and heavy so

*As 't were that Frederick put them on of straw,”*

where Dante has a simple *che*.

But in spite of Mr. Rossetti's anxious fidelity, Mr. Longfellow is really the more accurate of the two. We may sometimes differ with the latter as to the choice he makes between two readings or interpretations ; but that he has exactly given the meaning of the Italian, or one of its meanings, we are never in doubt. We cannot say this of Mr. Rossetti. We have not, it is true, examined his translation critically, with a view to this special quality, but enough slips have caught our eye to justify what we have said. For example, he translates the verse,

“ *Quinci non passa mai anima bona,*”

“ *From here not ever doth a good soul pass,*” —

which is not true to Dante's conception. Good souls might pass from there, as Trajan's did. “ Through here,” is the sense of *quinci*, as where the angel in purgatory says, *entrate quindi*. So, where he is describing the spirits who were “ transversed,” as he oddly calls it, he translates *dalle reni* by “ from the reins,” though *da* has here its not unusual meaning of *to-ward*. His translating *provi se sa* (VIII. 92) by “ prove if he know,” may be defended, but it is clear to us that *sapere* is here used in its sense of *to be able* (*can* and *ken* in English show the analogy), and that “ let him try if he can ” is much more natural. In the same canto (113, 114), for

“ *Ma ei non stette là con essi guari*

*Che ciascun dentro a pruova si ricorse,*”

we have

“ But he did not stay with them there for long,

For every one ran back a race within,” —

which, to say nothing of the obscurity of the last verse, is not what Dante says. The meaning is, “ But hardly did he stand with them (i. e. hardly had he arrived) when each gat him in

as fast as he could." Sometimes his deviations seem merely made to lengthen the verse, as in Canto V., where he translates *tignemmo* by "had to stain"; and in Canto VI. has the awkward phrase

" But when *thou art to be* in the sweet world,"

where the original says simply *sarai*. This would explain his telling us of Erichtho, that she

" to their bodies was recalling (*richiamava*) souls,"

as if she were doing it for the nonce, instead of being wont to do it. But how can he make

" and they thus  
Together run in vengeance as in wrath,"

(which we confess our inability to understand,) out of

" *cosi insieme*  
*Alla vendetta vanno come all' ira* " ?

Of his surprising whimsy about *al giudizio divin passion porta*, we shall say nothing. We have no desire to hunt for flaws in a version which was certainly the best that had appeared before Mr. Longfellow's, and which in many passages rivals, in some surpasses his. But translations are for the general reader ; and, all other considerations apart, Mr. Longfellow's has eminently that merit of readableness which Mr. Rossetti's in our opinion as eminently lacks.

It is of course impossible to convey by extracts an adequate impression of a work so extended as Mr. Longfellow's translation ; but we can illustrate, perhaps, some of the qualities which combine to give it its pre-eminence, by taking a few passages from different portions of his volumes.

We have spoken of naturalness, simplicity, and directness as essential attributes of a good translation of Dante. Mr. Longfellow's version might be opened at random with the assurance that the page would exhibit these qualities. It would be impossible to render more exactly the famous episode of Ugolino than it is done in the following powerful verses : —

" Thou hast to know I was Count Ugolino,  
And this one was Ruggieri the Archbishop ;  
Now I will tell thee why I am such a neighbor.

That, by effect of his malicious thoughts,  
 Trusting in him I was made prisoner,  
 And after put to death, I need not say ;  
 But ne'ertheless what thou canst not have heard,  
 That is to say, how cruel was my death,  
 Hear shalt thou, and shalt know if he has wronged me.  
 A narrow perforation in the mew,  
 Which bears because of me the title of Famine,  
 And in which others still must be locked up,  
 Had shown me through its opening many moons  
 Already, when I dreamed the evil dream  
 Which of the future rent for me the veil.  
 This one appeared to me as lord and master,  
 Hunting the wolf and whelps upon the mountain  
 For which the Pisans cannot Lucca see.  
 With sleuth-hounds gaunt, and eager, and well trained,  
 Gualandi with Sismondi and Lanfranchi  
 He had sent out before him to the front.  
 After brief course seemed unto me forespent  
 The father and the sons, and with sharp tushes  
 It seemed to me I saw their flanks ripped open.  
 When I before the morrow was awake,  
 Moaning amid their sleep I heard my sons  
 Who with me were, and asking after bread.  
 Cruel indeed art thou, if yet thou grieve not,  
 Thinking of what my heart foreboded me,  
 And weep'st thou not, what art thou wont to weep at ?  
 They were awake now, and the hour drew nigh  
 At which our food used to be brought to us,  
 And through his dream was each one apprehensive ;  
 And I heard locking up the under door  
 Of the horrible tower ; whereat without a word  
 I gazed into the faces of my sons.  
 I wept not, I within so turned to stone ;  
 They wept ; and darling little Anselm mine  
 Said : ' Thou dost gaze so, father, what doth ail thee ?  
 Still not a tear I shed, nor answer made  
 All of that day, nor yet the night thereafter,  
 Until another sun rose on the world.  
 As now a little glimmer made its way  
 Into the dolorous prison, and I saw  
 Upon four faces my own very aspect,  
 Both of my hands in agony I bit ;  
 And, thinking that I did it from desire  
 Of eating, on a sudden they uprose,  
 And said they : ' Father, much less pain 't will give us  
 If thou do eat of us ; thyself didst clothe us  
 With this poor flesh, and do thou strip it off.'

I calmed me then, not to make them more sad.  
 That day we all were silent, and the next.  
 Ah ! obdurate earth, wherefore didst thou not open ?  
 When we had come unto the fourth day, Gaddo  
 Threw himself down outstretched before my feet,  
 Saying, ' My father, why dost thou not help me ? '  
 And there he died ; and, as thou seest me,  
 I saw the three fall one by one, between  
 The fifth day and the sixth ; whence I betook me,  
 Already blind, to groping over each,  
 And three days called them after they were dead ;  
 Then hunger did what sorrow could not do."

*Inferno*, XXXIII. 13 – 75.

The skill and beauty with which the translator has rendered the softer tones of the poem is not less striking than the vigor and strength of such a passage as that just cited. We quote the opening verses of the twenty-eighth canto of *Purgatory*, descriptive of the *Terrestrial Paradise* : —

" Eager already to search in and round  
 The heavenly forest, dense and living-green,  
 Which tempered to the eyes the new-born day,  
 Withouten more delay I left the bank,  
 Taking the level country slowly, slowly  
 Over the soil that everywhere breathes fragrance.  
 A softly-breathing air, that no mutation  
 Had in itself, upon the forehead smote me  
 No heavier blow than of a gentle wind,  
 Whereat the branches, lightly tremulous,  
 Did all of them bow downward toward that side  
 Where its first shadow casts the Holy Mountain ;  
 Yet not from their upright direction swayed,  
 So that the little birds upon their tops  
 Should leave the practice of each art of theirs ;  
 But with full ravishment the hours of prime,  
 Singing, received they in the midst of leaves,  
 That ever bore a burden to their rhymes,  
 Such as from branch to branch goes gathering on  
 Through the pine forest on the shores of Chiassi,  
 When Eolus unlooses the Sirocco.  
 Already my slow steps had carried me  
 Into the ancient wood so far, that I  
 Could not perceive where I had entered it.  
 And lo ! my further course a stream cut off,  
 Which tow'rd the left hand with its little waves  
 Bent down the grass that on its margin sprang.

All waters that on earth most limpid are  
     Would seem to have within themselves some mixture  
     Compared with that which nothing doth conceal,  
 Although it moves on with a brown, brown current  
     Under the shade perpetual, that never  
     Ray of the sun lets in, nor of the moon.  
 With feet I stayed, and with mine eyes I passed  
     Beyond the rivulet, to look upon  
     The great variety of the fresh may.  
 And there appeared to me (even as appears  
     Suddenly something that doth turn aside  
     Through very wonder every other thought)  
 A lady all alone, who went along  
     Singing and culling floweret after floweret,  
     With which her pathway was all painted over.  
 ‘ Ah, beauteous lady, who in rays of love  
     Dost warm thyself, if I may trust to looks,  
     Which the heart’s witnesses are wont to be,  
 May the desire come unto thee to draw  
     Near to this river’s bank,’ I said to her,  
     ‘ So much that I may hear what thou art singing.  
 Thou makest me remember where and what  
     Proserpina that moment was when lost  
     Her mother her, and she herself the Spring.’  
 As turns herself, with feet together pressed  
     And to the ground, a lady who is dancing,  
     And hardly puts one foot before the other,  
 On the vermilion and the yellow flowerets  
     She turned towards me, not in other wise  
     Than maiden who her modest eyes casts down ;  
 And my entreaties made to be content,  
     So near approaching, that the dulcet sound  
     Came unto me together with its meaning.  
 As soon as she was where the grasses are  
     Bathed by the waters of the beauteous river,  
     To lift her eyes she granted me the boon.  
 I do not think there shone so great a light  
     Under the lids of Venus, when transfixed  
     By her own son, beyond his usual custom !  
 Erect upon the other bank she smiled,  
     Bearing full many colors in her hands,  
     Which that high land produces without seed.”

It would be difficult to surpass such translation as this ; and  
 the more closely it is scrutinized and compared with the origi-  
 nal, the more excellent will it appear.

Mr. Longfellow has proved that an almost literal rendering is not incompatible with an exquisite poetic charm, and although he may in some instances have followed the exact order of the Italian phrase too closely for the best effect, his diction is in the main graceful and idiomatic. We would gladly enter into a minute criticism to illustrate these general positions ; but there is little need to defend propositions which few readers will be inclined to question, and of the truth of which every page affords proof. Let one instance stand for many. We set the last lines of the thirty-first canto of Purgatory side by side in the Italian and the English : —

“ Volgi, Beatrice, volgi gli occhi santi,  
 Era la sua canzone, al tuo fedele  
 Che, per vederti, ha mossi passi tanti.  
 Per grazia fa noi grazia che disvele  
 A lui la bocca tua, sì che discerna  
 La seconda bellezza che tu cele.  
 O isplendor di viva luce eterna,  
 Chi pallido si fece sotto l' ombra  
 Sì di Parnaso, o bevve in sua cisterna,  
 Che non paresse aver la mente ingombra,  
 Tentando a render te qual tu paresti  
 Là dove armonizzando il ciel t' adombra,  
 Quando nell' aere aperto ti solvesti ? ”

“ ‘ Turn, Beatrice, O turn thy holy eyes,  
 Such was their song, ‘ unto thy faithful one,  
 Who has to see thee ta'en so many steps.  
 In grace do us the grace that thou unveil  
 Thy face to him, so that he may discern  
 The second beauty which thou dost conceal.’  
 O splendor of the living light eternal !  
 Who underneath the shadow of Parnassus  
 Has grown so pale, or drunk so at its cistern,  
 He would not seem to have his mind encumbered  
 Striving to paint thee as thou didst appear,  
 Where the harmonious heaven o'ershadowed thee,  
 When in the open air thou didst unveil ? ”

In fine, Mr. Longfellow, in rendering the substance of Dante's poem, has succeeded in giving also — so far as art and genius could give it — the spirit of Dante's poetry. Fitted for the work as few men ever were, by gifts of nature, by sympathy, by an unrivalled faculty of poetic appreciation, and by long and

thorough culture, he has brought his matured powers, in their full vigor, to its performance, and has produced an incomparable translation, — a poem that will take rank among the great English poems. With the increase of general cultivation his work will be more and more highly prized ; and it runs no risk of being superseded or supplanted by any more successful achievement for which it must itself have prepared the way. It is a lasting addition to the choicest works of our literature.

It will not be surprising, indeed, if many readers who take up these volumes with indefinite expectations, attracted to them by the fame of Dante, and by their anticipation of pleasure from whatever Mr. Longfellow may produce, should experience, as they read, a certain sense of disappointment, and fail to receive the easy gratification for which they looked. But the fault will be in themselves, not in the author or the translator. Their disappointment will arise from their own want of culture, and of consequent ability to appreciate the true merit of the poem. The *Divine Comedy* is not a book to be popular, in the sense in which the *Lady of the Lake*, or the *Idyls of the King*, or *Evangeline*, is popular. To be understood aright it requires study, and to be appreciated at its real worth it demands of its foreign and modern reader both quickness and breadth of sympathy, by which he may be enabled to enter into thoughts, beliefs, and conditions of feeling remote from his own, and into a life and character unfamiliar to his experience. Without study and without insight he cannot reap the delight and instruction which the poem offers to him who possesses these qualifications for its enjoyment. But to one who has fitted himself by study, and whose nature enables him to reap the profit of his toil, Mr. Longfellow's version will be the means by which, while ignorant of the language of the original, he may enter into and take possession as his own of one of those rare works of genius which share with Nature herself in the power to administer vital nutriment to the spirit of man, and to afford continual delight adapted to his various moods. Dante did not write to please alone, but to instruct and to help as well ; and in spite of change of time and circumstance and thought, his poem remains, and will remain, of the highest service to the highest men.



The Notes and Illustrations which Mr. Longfellow has appended to his translation form a comment upon the poem such as is not elsewhere to be found. It is not only elucidatory of its obscurities, and explanatory of its allusions, but it is a body of really interesting and valuable remark upon the poet and his poem, collected from a wide field of learning, and the fruit of years of preparation and study. Avoiding controversy upon disputed points, Mr. Longfellow states the grounds of his own interpretation with brevity, and occasionally refers to the bitter disputes of the pugnacious Italian commentators with a humorous enjoyment of the extravagant exaggerations of their irascible pens. He does not propose any mystical system of interpretation of the poem, which substitutes the jargon of a sect for the simple directness and transparent significance of the poet's meaning; but after stating the various interpretations which have been given of the perplexing enigmas and allegories of some of the cantos, he selects that which seems to afford the most rational explanation, or he leaves his reader to determine for himself, with full knowledge of the case. The notes are full of pleasant learning, set forth with that grace and beauty of style which are characteristic of Mr. Longfellow's prose; and the long extracts which he gives from Carlyle, Macaulay, Ruskin, and other eminent writers, make his comment a thesaurus of the best judgments that exist in English concerning the poet and his poem. Out of the much that has been written concerning Dante, much of the best is here preserved. Yet, after reading it all, one who has studied the *Divine Comedy*, sharing in the least the spirit in which it was written; who has entered into it so far as to understand how truly it became its author to speak of it as

"the sacred poem

To which both heaven and earth have set their hand";

who has heard

"The voices of the city and the sea,  
The voices of the mountains and the pines,  
Repeat the song, till the familiar lines  
Are footpaths for the thought of Italy";

and who has drawn from it any part of that nourishment it is able to supply to the will and the intellect;—such a one

cannot but feel how little worth what is written about Dante possesses, save as it makes him and his works more familiar and better understood. Dante is his own best interpreter; and of the followers of such a master he serves him best who, like Mr. Longfellow, translates him with such fidelity that new proselytes may "in their own language hear his wondrous word."

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#### ART. V. — THE JUDICIARY OF NEW YORK CITY.

THE disgraceful character of the municipal government of New York is notorious. The absolute exclusion of all honest men from any practical control of affairs in that city,\* and the supremacy in the Common Council of pickpockets, prize-fighters, emigrant runners, pimps, and the lowest class of liquor-dealers, are facts which admit of no question. But many respectable citizens of New York have been accustomed to console themselves with the belief that at least one department of the local government remained incorrupt; that the judiciary could still be depended upon; and that, whatever might be the fate of the public at the hands of aldermen, justice was yet impartially administered "between man and man." How far this belief is justified by the facts, we shall leave to the judgment of our readers, after they have considered the very small portion of those facts which we are able to disclose.

The large amount of legal business concentrated in the city of New York has made it necessary to establish in it a considerable number of courts, a brief account of which will materially aid those of our readers who do not reside in that city to comprehend the subject. For the sake of brevity, we shall give a merely general statement of the jurisdiction of these

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\* The present Mayor is a gentleman of high character; but he is comparatively powerless. So a few members of the Common Council are honest and unpurchasable; but they are too few to constitute any check upon the majority, even when a three-fourths vote is required.